



Travis County Fire Marshal's Office

Hershel Lee, Fire Marshal

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2011 Pedernales Wildland Fire Ruled as Accidental

The Travis County Fire Marshal's Office Fire Investigative Team completed their investigation of the 2011 Pedernales wildland fire and determined that a probable ignition source involved electrical lines, located above the area of the fire's origin. The investigation shows that the lines came into contact with either each other or the low-voltage phone lines directly below. The Team determined that the fire was accidental in nature.

The fire was first reported as a brush fire on Sept. 4, 2011, and originated approximately 1,000 feet from the 26249 Block of Haynie Flat Road. It burned for 11 days, involved nearly 6,500 acres and destroyed more than 60 structures before it was extinguished on September 15.

Investigators analyzed burn patterns, conducted witness interviews and numerous site visits to identify the probable ignition sequence and rule out other causes of the fire. They found that the unusually high wind speed of 17 to 24 mph, on the day of the fire, likely contributed to the electrical lines coming into contact with each other. Their investigation shows that this contact caused arcing on the line and created hot molten material that fell to the ground. Investigators determined that this ignition source ignited the dry combustible grass below, considering the wind speed, temperature, relative humidity and long-term drought conditions in the region.

On the day of the fire, the Keetch-Byram Drought Index for Travis County was an average of 782. (This index measures soil moisture content and ranges from 0 to 800 units, with 0 as wet and 800 as dry.) At the time the fire was reported, the weather station located in Spicewood, near the fire origin, recorded a temperature of 108 degrees, with a relative humidity of 17 percent. High wind, dry and dead trees and vegetation fueled the fire.

Emergency Service District 8 (Pedernales Fire Department) was the first Travis County agency to arrive on scene. They found a fast moving brush fire extending from an area about one hundred yards from Haynie Flat Road and heading south and west. Multiple agencies, both local and from across Texas, also fought the fire.

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